

Courier

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Fairfax County DFS and Kidsave International launch adoptive family program



Beverly Howard (l) and Verdia Haywood (r) join a friend to launch Kidsave in Fairfax County.

Verdia L. Haywood, deputy county executive for Fairfax County, kicked off the official recruiting launch for Kidsave Fairfax Weekend Miracles at a Nov. 8 lunch provided by Panda Express for county employees.

"We want county employees and all interested county residents to know that they now have an opportunity to help local children in foster care find adoptive parents by hosting or mentoring a child," Haywood said.

According to Carolyn Fowler, foster care and adoption program manager for the Fairfax County Department of Family Services, "Our goal is that no child leave foster care without a permanent, lasting connection to an adult. The Weekend

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Event focuses on adoption

To focus on November as Adoption Month, the Department of Family Services held a special event in the Government Center on Friday evening, Nov. 12. More than 100 people enjoyed food, dance demonstrations, music and motivating speeches. Overall, it was a celebration that used the energy and motivation of many people to highlight the importance of giving a loving family environment to needy children.

The evening began with a buffet dinner sponsored by Cox Communications, a partner with DFS in supporting children's issues. During the dinner, a group of teenagers from New World Bilingual Institute Young Prodigy Dance Team gave a rousing demonstration of hip hop dancing, culminating in some very amazing and athletic break-dancing moves by several young men.

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From the County Executive



Tony Griffin

Greetings to all at the start of one of our most celebrated holiday seasons. Beginning with Thanksgiving and continuing through the New Year, for many of us this is a time for family, friends and fun. We as county employees, county residents and citizens of this great country have much to celebrate and I encourage you to take time to do so. As you reflect on this past year and our many accomplishments, let us remain committed to the tasks before us that will help Fairfax County remain a community of quality, service and compassion.

Time and again, the outstanding qualities of county employees generate great pride in our workforce. Your creativity and hard work in meeting challenges, such as budgetary constraints, public safety concerns, social service needs, unplanned emergency operations and many other activities, continue to reflect favorably on the county with numerous awards and recognitions. But most of all, it's the appreciation expressed by our county residents that verifies a job well done.

Over this holiday season, I ask you to savor our many blessings and to reach out to those less fortunate. And please don't forget those serving in our military, both at home and abroad. They should always know they are remembered.

May you have a safe and wonderful holiday season.

Tony Griffin

Winter weather means possible office closings

When bad weather hits this winter, it could affect county offices. For regional consistency, the term *liberal leave* has been changed to *unscheduled leave*; however, the meaning is the same. Here is a summary of the county's closing policy and places you can go to learn the status of county closings.

What is the closing policy?

In the event of bad weather, the county executive decides if county facilities should be opened, closed or on delayed arrival, and if *unscheduled* (formerly *liberal*) *leave* or *emergency administrative leave* is to be granted.

- ♦ Open – County is open as usual.
- ♦ Delayed arrival – Conditions warrant the county executive to delay the work day. Employees are granted *emergency administrative leave* for the delayed time specified. Employees arriving after that time will be charged *unscheduled leave*.
- ♦ Closed – County facilities are closed and *emergency administrative leave* is granted.
- ♦ Unscheduled leave – During bad weather when county facilities are open, the

county executive may grant *unscheduled leave* (formerly *liberal leave*). *Unscheduled leave* is compensatory, annual or leave without pay taken by an employee. Prior approval from supervisors isn't required but employees must call supervisors to let them know. Employees designated as emergency service must report for work.

- ♦ Emergency administrative leave – Paid leave authorized by the county executive.

How are employees notified of county closings?

During normal business hours, the Department of Human Resources notifies agencies of the county executive's decision for early closings. The Office of Public Affairs provides the closing information outside of normal business hours.

Where are places I can find county closing information?

- ♦ 703-817-7771 or 703-246-SNOW (7669), www.fairfaxcounty.gov, Channel 16 and the Emergency Alert Notification (EAN) system.

**For weather delays, check:
703-817-7771,
703-246-7669,
703-246-SNOW,
Channel 16
and the
Emergency Alert
Notification
system.**

Kidsave, from page 1

Miracles program enables the county to reach out to the public to help children who are waiting for adoptive families," said Fowler.

Beverly Howard, the county's Kidsave Fairfax coordinator, explained that through Weekend Miracles an individual or a family works with a child to find an adoptive home. "We have many children currently in need of mentors and adoptive families," said Howard. "All children in our system are over 10 years old and most are African American boys."

"We are looking for families to host the children on weekends over a three-month period to help find adoptive families," Howard continued. "There is no commitment for the host family to adopt, but we ask that they introduce the children to the family's circle of friends and take the children to planned events where potential adoptive families will be present." Howard added that organizations

and businesses also can support the program by hosting events for the children.

"Kidsave Fairfax Weekend Miracles is an ideal public/private partnership," said Fowler. "It combines the social work expertise of DFS, and the marketing support and coalition building of Kidsave International, a nonprofit organization. This program is being used successfully by Kidsave International to help children from Russian, Kazakh and Colombian orphanages to find adoptive families in the United States."

"Having a permanent family is vital to a child's healthy development into adulthood," Fowler continued. "With the help of Kidsave International, we can involve the community in finding adoptive families for our children."

For more information about Kidsave Fairfax Weekend Miracles, go to www.kidsave.org or call 703-683-5437, TTY 711. ■

Adoption, from page 1

Next, everyone moved to the Board Auditorium where they were welcomed by Emma Marshall, DFS, and Tilly Blanding, DFS. The Greater Little Zion Baptist Church Youth Choir got the place rocking with a series of gospel songs.

The featured speaker was Rev. W.C. Martin from Possum Trot, Texas (yes, there is such a community near the Texas-Louisiana border). Martin has traveled widely as an evangelist for child adoption, his own small community noted for having adopted 70 children.

"Through adoption, we can give a child a new lease on life and develop a citizen who will be an asset rather than a detriment to our society," he said, pointing out that the benefits of adoption don't only flow to a child. "Adopting parents, very special people, for sure, report many added blessings," he said. Martin uses the motto: "There is no such thing as an unwanted child, only unfound families."

Humor was added to the evening by "Miss Clareece" who used this medium to reemphasize a message of help, responsibility and commitment. "You young people must be strong to do the right things," she admon-

ished. Everyone could laugh with her but everyone understood the importance of her message of personal responsibility.

Dan Dunn described his family's positive experience adopting their daughter through the Fairfax County program.

Fairfax County, working through the county DFS, CRS and other organizations, provides many programs where volunteers can help children in need. Programs such as BeFriend-A-Child, Office for Partnerships, JUMP, and Foster Care & Adoption offer county employees and residents many ways to help children in our community.

For more information on programs in the county where your volunteer services can help, contact DFS at 703-324-7500, TTY 703-222-9452. ■



Tilly Blanding, DFS; Rev. W.C. Martin and Emma Marshall, DFS; stressed the importance of adoption.

Focus on Benefits



Deferred compensation: how to save on current taxes

Your 457 deferred compensation plan offers two powerful tools to accumulate money for retirement: pre-tax contributions and tax-deferred growth. By electing regular pre-tax deductions, saving is automatic.

What a difference \$20 can make! A small

increase each year in your contribution can make a significant difference in your deferred compensation account value by the time you retire.

For example, John and Mary are both 30 years old. They decide to enroll in a 457 plan and contribute \$25 biweekly. Both of them meet with their financial benefit specialist and receive benefit illustrations. John decides to increase his contributions by \$20 but Mary makes no change. By age 55, Mary has over \$49,000 in her account but John, at the same age, finds he has over \$329,000! Five years later, John has over \$500,000 – \$400,000 more than Mary. ■

Participant	Account Value Age 30	Biweekly Amount Age 30	Increase in Biweekly Amount	Account Value: Age 55	Account Value Age 60
Mary	\$0	\$25	\$0	\$49,468	\$76,655
John	\$0	\$25	\$20	\$329,333	\$529,702
The \$20 difference in additional account value				\$295,630	\$472,243
Assumed rate of return of 8 percent. Note that these are examples only. The performance of your account may be higher or lower.					

Limits increase in 2005

Employees participating in the county's 457 deferred compensation program will have higher plan limits for 2005. The normal deferred compensation limit will be \$14,000 (up from \$13,000) or 100 percent of includible compensation, whichever is less.

Playing catch-up in your 50s

If you are in your 50s or 60s and you have not been able to put aside as much money in your deferred compensation plan as you would like, it's not too late to play catch-up. There's still time to take advantage of the new tax laws and prepare financially for your retirement.

The 2005 age 50 additional catch-up limit will be \$4,000. This means that participants age 50 or older will be able to defer up to \$18,000 (normal limit of \$14,000 + age 50 limit of \$4,000) in 2005.

Additionally, employees who have reached or are within four years of their normal retirement date may defer up to \$28,000 in 2005 (up from \$26,000) by using the catch-up provision. The amount you can defer under catch-up is determined by your salary and your history of unused deferrals. If you are within four years of retirement, you can contact the Financial Benefits Help Desk at

703-324-4995, TTY 703-222-7314.

Make election changes in December

Employees who wish to change their deferral amount for the first pay date in January (Jan. 7, 2005) will need to submit their change form to DHR by Dec. 29. Biweekly deduction amounts are noted below for employees who choose to reach their 2005 plan contribution limit over 26 pay periods.

2005 Plan Limits	Bi weekly Deduction
Normal limit - \$14,000	\$539
Age 50 limit - \$18,000	\$693
Catch-up limit - \$28,000	\$1,077

Employees may submit deferred compensation enrollment or change forms anytime throughout the year. Enrollment and change forms received in DHR in any given month will become effective the first available pay date of the next month. Forms are available on the Infoweb or by calling the Financial Benefits Help Desk at 703-324-4995, TTY 703-222-7314. Completed forms may be faxed to 703-802-8795 or mailed to Employee Benefits, Department of Human Resources, Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway (Suite 258) Fairfax, VA 22035. ■

Detailed information on your benefits can be seen online at <http://infoweb/hr/benefits>

Updating your W-4 withholding form

Employees are reminded to file an updated Federal Form W-4, Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate (and applicable state income tax withholding form, if necessary) if their filing status and/or number of allowances/exemptions has changed.

Your current filing status (married or single) and number of allowances/exemptions (zero or more) is represented on your biweekly pay advice in the top right corner and displayed in online time under personnel and pay information, transaction 005-tax and address information.

You can update your filing status and/or number of allowances/exemptions by submitting a new W-4 (and applicable state income tax withholding form, if necessary) to the Payroll Division, Department of Human Resources, or by updating your PRISM online time record utilizing transaction 005. Forms are available from your agency payroll contact, the Infoweb at <http://infoweb/hr>. Click on forms and select the employee withholding form or get a form from DHR Resources Payroll Division, Government Center, Suite 258. ■

Holiday food drive until Dec. 9

Underway now through Dec. 9 is the holiday food drive. Celebrate the holiday season by getting into the spirit of giving and participating in the twelfth annual collection of nonperishable food items. Household cleaning supplies and personal hygiene items (toothpaste, soap, shampoo and toilet paper) are also being collected.

Please help those in Northern Virginia who are served by food pantries.

In the Government Center, there are collection boxes located in the cafeteria, and in the Department of Human Resources reception area (Suite 258) and application center (Suite 170).

If these collection sites are not convenient, please consider setting up a collection site in your agency and delivering all donated food to the Department of Human Resources, Suite 258, by the morning of Dec. 9.

Last year, we provided a local day shelter in Fairfax with more than 20 boxes of items. Let's do the same – and more – this year.

Contact Traci Vaughn, DHR, at 703-324-3317, TTY 703-222-7314, if you have any questions. ■

County employees count the votes

When the call went out for help counting more than 50,000 absentee ballots, county employees responded in fine fashion. More than two-thirds of the 150 volunteers counting absentee ballots were county employees.

"It was very rewarding to have so many county employees helping out," said Evelyn Shaffer, election officer and member of the Electoral Board. The Government Center was the precinct for absentee ballots.

County employees are encouraged to support the election process and are given an administrative day of leave to work in an election. Volunteers must be county residents, however. Visit the Electoral Board Web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/EB



Helping count ballots on election day were Jody Douglas, ASAP; Mervin Rosen, husband of Judith Rosen, DFS; Maria Bray, DFS; Dan Dildine, DFS; Ivy Tillman, Juvenile Detention; Julie Miller, DFS.

On the street

Members of the Reston Community Center were asked their opinions on Thanksgiving. "What should people be thankful for?" and "What do you like most about Thanksgiving?" generated some nice responses, helping us all remember the purpose of this holiday. Thanks to Liz Milner, communications director, for putting all of this together for *Courier*.

Leila Gordon, performing arts director, "I'm thankful for the passion people bring to their politics — no matter what their beliefs. Democracy is as strong as its citizens make it. What I

would enjoy most on Thanksgiving would be paper plates! Some dreams never come true!"



Special Events Director Haywood R. Hopson, Sr., "I'm thankful for my health and family. And I enjoy feasting." A man of few words.



Dennis J. Kern, executive director, "People should be thankful for the things that truly matter in life: health, family, friends, and the time to enjoy them. I try to slow down a bit and be

with the people in my life who mean the most to me. Happy Thanksgiving!"

"There is nothing like Thanksgiving in my native El Salvador. Christmas is the closest holiday where we eat and celebrate our good fortunes. We all should be thankful for life, family, jobs and food. I like having a great meal with my family on Thanksgiving," Santos Campos, maintenance technician



Lora Williams, booking manager, "People should be thankful that we live in a free society with the rights and privileges we enjoy as Americans. Many people in the world don't have these

advantages. And like most people, I enjoy the 'over indulgence' of Thanksgiving."

"Being with my daughter and son-in-law to give thanks for having another Thanksgiving to celebrate with my family is special for me," says Helen Bryant, customer service representative.



Cindy Fortuño, media specialist, "I'm thankful for the time with my family and to celebrate that everyone is happy and healthy. Thanksgiving is a very special time."

The Reston Community Center provides educational and leisure activities for those who live and work in Small District #5. You can learn more about the Reston Community Center by visiting our Web site at www.restoncommunitycenter.com.

Briefs

2004 Don Smith Award Nomination now accepted

The Employees Advisory Council's Don Smith Award recognizes individual employees who contribute to the well-being of their fellow workers. Nominations for the award are being accepted until Friday, Dec. 3. Any county merit employee may nominate or be nominated for the award.

The award recognizes those who demonstrate outstanding dedication and contributions to their fellow employees. Award recipients receive an engraved plaque and a cash award of up to \$1,000. Nomination forms are available from EAC representatives, payroll contacts or the Department of Human Resources. Please contact Bob Fitzpatrick at 703-324-3306, TTY 703-222-7314 or

Robert.Fitzpatrick@FairfaxCounty.gov for further information.

County Carolers Practice Schedule

The County Carolers welcomes employees to join us in singing traditional Christmas carols. Practices are scheduled on Mondays and Wednesdays (and on one Friday) from noon to 1 p.m. in the Government Center Room 443C, 12000 Government Center Parkway. (Please note this is a room change for the practices and an updated performance schedule from a previous announcement.) Performances are scheduled for noon to 1 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 2, in the Pennino Building lobby, 12011 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax; Monday,

Dec. 6, in the Herrity Building lobby, 12055 Government Center Parkway; and Wednesday, Dec. 8, in the Government Center Forum. For additional information on the County Carolers or reasonable ADA accommodations, contact Debby Michalowski at 703-324-2763 or Chau Le at 703-324-2741, TTY 703-968-0217.

Recycling wins again

The Fairfax County Employee Recycling Committee was one of four programs in Virginia to be honored with a "spotlight" award for excellent programming from the Virginia Recycling Association. The ERC created an Infoweb site and sponsored county-wide programs for Clean Your Files Week, Earth Day/Arbor Day and America Recycles Day. ■

How to enjoy the holiday foods without guilt!

The holidays are a time for fun, friends and family – and food! But sometimes on festive occasions with food, we simply over indulge! Holiday feasting can be a big fat pain in the behind....and the thighs....and the waist. But it doesn't have to be. Whether you have control over what's being served or not, here are some tips to enjoy holiday foods, and still have fun, eat our fill and not regret it the next day.

- ♦ Have a light snack before a big meal. The snack will quell your appetite. Just remember not to go for "social seconds" and add unneeded calories.
- ♦ Drink a lot...of water, that is. A large glass of water 30 minutes before a big Thanksgiving meal will make you feel fuller and subsequently eat less.
- ♦ Go light on heavy. Some foods are especially rich in calories. Have smaller portions of these while choosing more lower calorie dishes, like salads and vegetables.
- ♦ Eat slowly. The slower we eat, the faster our brains can catch up and tell us we're full. Talk a lot...and cut down on calories.
- ♦ Walk after eating. After a big holiday meal, plan to walk with friends. It helps aid the digestion process while providing some exercise as well. Walking also is an excellent exercise all year round. It doesn't cost anything more than a little commitment and the results can be rewarding and healthful.
- ♦ Exercise regularly. During the time you may expect to attend parties or enjoy office nibbles, try to balance any increased calorie intake with additional exercising. The answer to weight control is simply "input equals output."

If you would like other ideas on healthy exercise programs, you can talk with me at the Fitness Center in the Government Center or stop by any of the county recreation centers. We'll be glad to help you develop an exercise program for an improved quality of life.

- *Chuck Wright, Government Center Fitness Center manager,*
charles.wright@fairfaxcounty.gov, 703-324-5590, TTY 711



Security & Safety Matters

Gangs – would you know if your child was involved?

If you've read the local news lately, you know that Fairfax County is home to several gangs. The Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) estimates that there are up to 2,000 gang members and associates in the county.

The average age of a gang member is between 12 and 24 years old and includes all ethnic groups. Females comprise 10 percent of gang membership. Gangs by definition are groups of people that band together for a common cause and are involved in criminal activity. Although it is not against the law to belong to a gang, it is against the law to recruit into a gang or to force someone into a gang.

Why do kids join a gang? For a sense of identity and belonging, missing a connection with their family, peer pressure, protection and believing that doing so is fun, exciting and cool. And who joins? There are several risk factors, such as a lack of positive support at home, living in an area with high gang activity, low self-esteem, and too much unsupervised free time, especially between the hours of 2 and 6 p.m.

Would you recognize if your child was involved in a gang? Here are some

signs to look for: Are your children buying or wearing clothes of one color only? Certain gangs wear special colors and never wear other colors. Are they changing their appearance with

Stay involved with your kids

special haircuts, eyebrow markings or tattoos? Have you noticed your children displaying hand signals with their friends? Is there gang graffiti on their folders and school books? Have they developed a bad attitude/lack of respect towards family, school and authorities? Are they staying out late, withdrawing from family activities, changing friends to spend more time with undesirable kids? Do they have more money or possessions that can't be explained? Keep in mind that one or more of these signs do not necessarily indicate your children are involved in gang activity.

If you suspect your children may be involved in a gang or are considering joining a gang, what can you as a parent do to prevent this? Stay involved with your kids by providing supervised group activities, especially between those important hours of between 2 – 6 p.m. Praise your chil-

dren when they are doing well. Get to know your kids' friends and their parents. Set limits for your children and enforce them. Do not allow them to dress in gang style clothing. Know

where they are at all times and check on them.

Teach your children to set positive goals and hold

them to high standards. Help them to understand the consequences of being in a gang; that initiations into gangs often involve physical abuse or, in the case of females, being gang raped. The most important factor in discouraging your children from gang involvement is to help them develop strong connections with their family, school and community.

For more information on gang prevention you can refer to the following Web sites:

www.safeyouth.org/scripts/faq/protectgang.asp, www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/healthsafety/violprev/gang.asp.

Additional local resources include P.D. O'Keefe, Fairfax County Public Schools, Safe and Drug-Free Youth Section, 703-876-5264, TTY 711, or the Fairfax County Police Department Youth Services Division, 703-246-4564, TTY 711. ■

Build a box

The Nov. 12 Courier featured an article on an excellent way we can show our support for military men and women serving in Iraq. Just fill a box of "things from home" that would be useful to our soldiers and let them know we remember them. Fill your box with items ranging from CDs to Game Boys to home-made cookies (a larger list was published in *Courier*) and call Bill Dunn, assistant manager at James Lee Community Center, 703-534-3387, TTY 711, for a soldier's name. Then mail your box, knowing that it will tell our men and women that we remember them.



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